

The Administrative Law Judge then can make a decision based on what they think the plan provides, whether it is covered or whether it is not covered. If the Administrative Law Judge rules against the Medicare beneficiary, the beneficiary can appeal the decision to the Departmental Appeals Board at the Social Security Administration.

Then, there is a fifth step in the process if the Administrative Law Judge or Appeals Board finds in favor of the plan and against the beneficiary. If the patient is denied coverage by the Administrative Law Judge, that patient still has the right to judicial review in U.S. district court where he can push his case and plead that the procedure be covered. He can't sue for damages; he can't sue for punitive damages, or compensatory damages, but he can sue for coverage. If it is a bone marrow transplant, he could sue for the cost of that procedure, or an MRI, or whatever the procedure would be. This is what we do for Medicare. This is what Congress has helped establish for the 15 percent of Medicare patients who are now in HMOs. It is already in existence and in statute and it works.

A good thing about this, in addition to the fact that it is already there and we know how it works, is that it prevents most of the cases from ever having to go to court in the first place. Either the first, second, or the third level of review solves the problem, and it is done in a timely fashion. Does anybody think they can go to court and get a decision within 72 hours? You could not even file the papers within 72 hours. You would have depositions, hearings, a trial, an appeal, and then it gets kicked back down, and the patient has died, and you are still litigating whether they should be covered or not. That is not necessarily a good procedure.

What I am suggesting to those who say, "Don't allow suits" and to those who say, "You have to have suits in this Patients' Bill of Rights," is that there is a middle ground that makes sense. I ask all of my colleagues just to consider that we are so close to the end of this session and neither side is going to get everything it wants; it is just not going to happen. If we hold out for everything we want and not try to compromise, we are going to go home and argue about failure because nothing will pass. There is a better way to serve the people and that is, I suggest, to say on this question of what rights to give patients when they are denied coverage, let's take what we already do in the Medicare Program and establish that as the procedure to be used for managed care plans in the private sector. While it needs some fine-tuning, it works; it has a proven track record. It is not perfect, but it certainly is better than what patients have right now because, in most cases, patients do not have the right to any kind of internal or external appeal if coverage is denied. I suggest that this makes a great deal of sense and could help resolve part of this problem. We can bring this

bill up to the floor next week, adopt this amendment, and then ultimately send this to the President, who I think would be certainly willing to sign something that may not be 100 percent what he wants, maybe not 100 percent of what anyone wants, but it is 100 percent more than we are going to get if we do nothing. This is a suggestion that I hope our colleagues will seriously consider.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DEWINE). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HUTCHINSON). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from North Dakota has 30 minutes reserved. Is it that time that the Senator would intend to use?

Mr. KENNEDY. The Chair is correct. I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is recognized.

#### INCREASING THE MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, under the leadership of President Clinton, the country has enjoyed six years of economic growth. Unemployment is at its lowest level in a generation. Inflation is the lowest in 40 years. Despite this week's gymnastics by the stock market, economic indicators continue to be strong. Job growth is projected to continue throughout this year, and inflation is predicted to remain at historically low levels.

But for most Americans, it's someone else's boom. Too many citizens are just one paycheck away from bankruptcy. Facing a sudden health crisis, a divorce, or some other family emergency—these families often have no choice but to declare bankruptcy.

My Republican colleagues respond with legislation to make it easier for banks and credit card companies to squeeze these already-struggling families even harder. I say, giant corporations don't need the help as much as families do.

And the best way to provide effective help is to raise the minimum wage. The amendment I have introduced today will raise the minimum wage by 50 cents on January 1 next year and another 50 cents on January 1, 2000. As we begin the next century, the minimum wage will be \$6.15 an hour.

Mr. President, as this chart illustrates, we can see where the minimum wage has gone since 1955 in terms of real dollars.

We were back here at \$4.34 in 1988. We raised the minimum wage here in a two-step procedure, and then it declined in terms of real purchasing power. And now we are talking about raising it up to what would be \$6.15 an hour in the year 2000. But if you look

at this chart, Mr. President, you will see that the actual purchasing power in the year 2000 in today's dollars would be only \$5.76. This chart is a constant, real dollar chart. And even if we raise it to this level, we will still be below where the minimum wage was for some 15 years from the 1960s through the 1970s under Republicans and Democrats alike—below that level at a time of extraordinary prosperity for millions of Americans—millions of Americans—even with that increase.

If we do not increase it, if we do not accept this amendment, we will find out that the minimum wage effectively will be not \$5.15 an hour, but \$4.82 an hour, which will put us close to the lowest levels in the last 35 years in terms of purchasing power for working families at the lower end of the economic ladder.

Those at the bottom of the economic ladder have not received their fair share of the nation's remarkable growth. Working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, minimum wage workers earn just \$10,700—\$2,900 below the poverty level for a family of three.

In the midst of what many experts are calling "the best economy ever," 12 million working Americans are still earning poverty-level wages.

For them, survival is the daily goal. If they work hard enough and their hours are long enough, they can make ends meet—but only barely. They don't have time for their families. They can't participate adequately in activities with their children.

They can't afford to buy birthday presents or do the countless other things that most of us take for granted.

We know who minimum wage workers are. They assist teachers in classrooms across the country. They care for the chronically ill in their homes. They are child care workers and aides in nursing homes. They sell us groceries at the supermarket, and serve us coffee at the local coffee shop. They clean corridors and empty trash in office buildings in countless communities around the nation.

They are workers like Valerie Bell, a custodian for a contractor in Baltimore, who told us what a higher minimum wage means in human terms. For workers and their families, it means far more than dollars and cents. It means dignity. As she said, "We no longer have to receive food stamps or other social services to supplement our incomes. We can fix up our homes and invest in our neighborhoods. We can spend more at the local grocery store. We can work two low-wage jobs, rather than three low-wage jobs, and spend more time with our families. Our utilities won't be cut off. We can pay the medical bills we accumulated from not having health benefits in our jobs."

Minimum wage workers are people like Cathy Adams, a home health aide from Viola, IL. Cathy is a high school graduate who is currently enrolled in a computer training program at the local

community college. She lives with her two daughters, who are 10 and 11.

Cathy works 11 and one-half hours a day, five days a week, caring for a woman with multiple sclerosis. She bathes her, dresses her and feeds her. She does the grocery shopping, the laundry, and the cleaning. She runs errands and schedules doctors' appointments.

Cathy likes her job and is fond of her client. But she finds it hard to live on \$5.30 an hour. She told us in March that "I literally live paycheck to paycheck. After paying the bills, whatever is left over goes to groceries. I have \$9 in my savings account and worry about being able to save for my girls' education. We rarely have money to go to a movie or eat out at a restaurant.

The other day, my girls asked me to take them ice skating at school. While it only cost \$10, I had to think twice about whether we could afford it."

And minimum wage earners are workers like Kimberly Frazier, a child care aide from Philadelphia. Kimberly works full time and earns \$5.20 an hour. She is a single mother with three children.

Kimberly says that her salary barely covers her bills—rent of \$250 a month, food, utilities, clothing for three growing children, and carfare to get to work. Kimberly says, "I can't afford a car and pay for gas and insurance so I rely on public transportation. If I had a car, I could get out to the places where there are better paying jobs. And, like all Americans, I dream of buying my own house so that I can raise my kids in a neighborhood that has less crime and more trees. But I know that, although I work and study as hard as I can, I will never have the down payment for a house earning the minimum wage."

Kimberly concluded that "A dollar an hour probably doesn't sound like a lot to many people, but to me and my children it would mean a real improvement in our lives."

Workers like Valerie Bell, Cathy Adams, and Kimberly Frazier tell stories that are repeated in communities across the nation. That's why we say now is the time to raise the minimum wage.

Nay-sayers parrot the same arguments they have always used against a fair increase. They claim an increase will damage the economy, cut jobs, and hurt the very people it's intended to help. The facts belie those claims.

A study released May 6 by the Economic Policy Institute proves the point. The two most recent increases in the minimum wage did not cause the sky to fall. There was no measurable effect on jobs; no measurable effect on inflation. The only measurable effect on low-income workers was positive. They received the pay increase they deserved. Mr. President, 60 percent of the benefit of the 1996-1997 increases went to families in the bottom 40 percent of the income groups; a third of the benefit went to the poorest families, those

in the bottom 20 percent. Nearly three-quarters of those who benefited were adults over the age of 20. On the average, minimum-wage workers contributed over half of their family's weekly earnings.

The most recent data support the increase. Raising the minimum wage does not cause unemployment for men and women, adults, teens or anyone else. Look at the teenagers. We have a chart for the teenagers. The argument is made that the most vulnerable group is teenagers. But if we look at the employment levels for ages 16 through 19, before the minimum wage increased to \$4.75 in 1996 and then to \$5.15 in 1997, we see that the total employment for teenagers has risen steadily. Nearly 400,000 more teenagers are working today than before the increase took effect. So increasing the minimum wage has not lowered teenage employment.

Teenage unemployment has dropped dramatically during the same period, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The unemployment rate was nearly 17 percent when the minimum wage was first increased. Today the unemployment rate among teenagers is 14 percent, a drop of almost 20 percent since the last increase.

Minimum wage opponents typically claim that low-wage industries will lay off workers rather than pay a higher minimum wage. But look what happened in the retail industry where many low-wage workers are concentrated. In the year before the minimum wage was increased, retail employment grew by just under 400,000 jobs. In 1994 and 1995, before we increased the minimum wage to \$4.75, there were 394,000 new retail jobs. In the eleven months since we raised the minimum wage, there have been 500,000 new retail jobs; retail employment has increased since the last raise. The argument that raising the minimum wage causes job loss for the most vulnerable, the teenagers and those who are the working poor, does not hold. The facts are not there. That argument cannot be made.

Retail employment grew over 25 percent faster since the minimum wage was actually increased because, many economists believe, when you do get a respectable wage for minimum wage, people will go back to work and go to work and increasingly move off unemployment or the welfare system, because they are able to provide for their families.

Despite these figures, too many of our Republican friends oppose giving minimum wage workers an additional \$1 an hour. Instead, their priority is reforming bankruptcy laws by rewarding banks and credit card companies who target low-income families. That will be the item on the agenda, according to the majority leader. So today I am filing the minimum wage as an amendment to the bankruptcy bill.

Democrats agree, plums for the rich and crumbs for everyone else is the wrong priority. We need to do more for

working families and communities across America. We can do more by raising the minimum wage, and with the strong support of President Clinton, Democrats in the Senate and House and some courageous Republicans, I intend to do so.

I see my colleagues here. Let me just point out what this issue is really all about. This is a women's issue, because more than 60 percent of the recipients are women. This is a family issue, because many of those women have one child or more. So it is a children's issue. What kind of life are these children going to lead? What kind of atmosphere are they going to be growing up in? Are they going to have a parent available to them or is that parent going to be out working two or three jobs? Is that parent going to be able to treat that child with dignity?

So this is an important issue. It's a family issue, a children's issue, a women's issue, and most of all, more than any other issue we will vote on here in the U.S. Senate, it is a defining fairness issue. It is a fairness issue. It is an issue whether America is going to say to those Americans who are prepared to work 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, that they will be able to live out of poverty. That is the issue.

Are we going to back up the speeches here in the U.S. Senate that say we applaud work? We are talking about those who are working. If you are working, you deserve a fair wage. With the most extraordinary prosperity we have seen in recent times, with the kind of creation of wealth we all read about—the stories about \$2 trillion being lost in the stock market in a period of 24 hours, we are talking about nickels and dimes for working men and women. We are not even talking about the kinds of increases Members of Congress have received during the same period of time. We are not talking about that, which is far in excess of what we are talking about for minimum wage workers. How bold will our colleagues be. Will they turn thumbs down on working families, and continue to accept the increases in their own pay received since the last increase in the minimum wage?

This is a fairness issue. It is whether we, as a country, are going to follow a proud tradition of Republican Presidents and Democratic Presidents, Republican support in the Congress of the United States and Democratic support. This has been, until recent years, a bipartisan effort—a bipartisan effort. The question is whether it will continue to be a bipartisan effort, to try and make sure that working families in this country have a living wage.

I hope this body will be willing to accept this amendment.

I yield 6 minutes to the Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, how much time do we have left? I have split time with Senator DURBIN. However he would like me to do it, I say to my colleague from Massachusetts.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader has until 10:30.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I will take just a few minutes then.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota is recognized.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I am pleased to join my friend from Massachusetts once again to speak about one of the most important issues facing American working families. At a time when our economy is performing well, many Americans who work hard, who work full time, still live in poverty. I don't know what better signal we could send at the end of this Congress to people who are working hard, trying to provide for their families, than to pass the American Family Fair Minimum Wage Act.

This increase in the minimum wage, which Senator KENNEDY and I and others intend to offer as an amendment, perhaps to the Bankruptcy bill, is the single most important step we can take in this country immediately to promote economic justice. It would lift the federal minimum wage to \$6.15 an hour over two years. That is a one-dollar-an-hour raise for American workers who labor near the bottom rung of our economic ladder as we enter the 21st century. Many of these men and women work just as hard if not harder than many of us here in the Congress. Yet they very often live economically insecure lives. They deserve a raise.

This modest raise would still leave the federal minimum wage at a level that would be worth less in real terms less than it was in 1968.

We all know that glaring economic injustice and inequality remain in America. We can say that there are two Americas—one with greater and greater access to all the things that make life richer in possibilities, the other struggling daily to make ends meet. Even as our economy is generally performing well, the disparity between rich and poor continues to grow. If we want to declare that we honor work, we must value it properly.

When I have toured the cafes of Minnesota, the streets of East L.A., the inner city of Chicago, people want to know how they can earn a decent living, how they can give their children the care they need and deserve. This minimum wage increase will help hard-working Minnesotans and all Americans in their efforts to make ends meet.

Seventy-four percent of those who receive the minimum wage are adults. Sixty percent are women. Fifty percent work more than 35 hours a week. Eighty-two percent work at least 20 hours. These numbers tell a story. Raising the minimum wage will help hard-working Americans, many supporting families, to earn a decent living.

The minimum wage disproportionately affects women, many of whom are single heads of households with children. Sixty percent of those who earn minimum wage are women. They

are teachers' aides, they are child care providers. They work hard, yet they make \$10,700 a year. That's \$2,900 below the poverty line for a family of three. That's not a living wage. To lift themselves from poverty, they must earn a fair living wage.

Some opponents of increasing the minimum wage argue that it will cause job losses and actually hurt workers. Recent experience effectively rebuts that claim. An Economic Policy Institute report released this year demonstrates that the minimum wage increase which took effect during 1996 and 1997 raised the wages of almost 10 million people. Seventy-one percent were adults and 58 percent were women. Just under half worked full-time. The research also found that the increases had disproportionately benefited low-income working households. Although households in the bottom 20 percent of the income distribution receive only 5 percent of total family income, they received 35 percent of the benefits from the minimum wage increases. Four different economic tests of these minimum-wage increases failed to find any systematic, significant job loss associated with the 1996-97 increases.

The overall conclusion of the EPI report was that the 1996-97 increase in the minimum wage proved to be an effective tool for raising the earnings of low-wage workers without lowering their employment opportunities. In other words, it worked.

So now it is our responsibility to continue this process and assure that more Americans are able to earn a liveable wage. If we do not raise the minimum wage now, by the year 2000 the real value of the minimum wage will only be \$4.28 an hour—almost as low as it was when the 1996 bill was enacted. We must act now to allow 12 million workers to benefit from this increase.

In my home state, this minimum wage increase will benefit at least 147,000 working Minnesotans and probably more because when we increase the minimum wage, it applies pressure to increase wages for people also making slightly more than the minimum wage. In 1996, 39% of Minnesota's workers paid at the minimum wage were between the ages of 16 and 21. Now, those numbers show us two important things: first, that the majority of Minnesotans just like the majority of Americans earning the minimum wage are adults. This issue is not just about helping youngsters looking for a paying job after school. But second, at the same time, many of these minimum wage workers between the ages of 16 and 21 are trying to make money to stay in school, to pay the bills as they study to receive their college degrees. In Minnesota, we have record low unemployment, but state statistics show that increasing the minimum wage will not significantly affect the number of minimum wage jobs available for people needing the work to make ends meet.

We celebrate the affluence that so many Americans have enjoyed in recent years. We need to make sure that the opportunity to share in that prosperity is available to all Americans, whether they are in the top 20 percent of wage-earners or the bottom 20 percent. People rightly believe that if you play by the rules in America, if you work 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, then you should not be poor.

Increasing the minimum wage is about justice and a livable wage. The American public supports it, and we should pass it.

Let me again thank Senator KENNEDY. This will be my eighth year in the Senate. I don't think there is anybody in the U.S. Senate, I don't think there is anybody close, to Senator TED KENNEDY leading this fight. It is an economic justice fight. We raised the minimum wage to \$5.15 an hour and people thought that couldn't be done. Senator KENNEDY led that fight and we did it. I am confident we are going to do it again. We are going to have an amendment on the bankruptcy bill and are going to talk about raising the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.15 over a 2-year period, and I think we will have a positive vote for it. It is the right thing to do. The majority of the people support it and this should be a priority for us.

Let me make three points. I heard my colleague from Massachusetts, and I am proud to join him in this effort and can't wait to have the debate. And I am proud to join Senator DURBIN from Illinois. I heard my colleague from Massachusetts talk about this being a family issue. I am pretty well convinced now, from the Minnesota State Fair to talking with people in cafes, to traveling the country, that this really is a family issue. If there is one thing we could do—and, you know what, my colleague, the Presiding Officer, I think, agrees with me, at least in part of what I am about to say—if there is one thing we can do more than anything else, it is to try to basically say our major goal is to make sure that parents, or parent, can do their very best by their kids. Because if parents can do their best by their kids, they are going to do their best for Arkansas or Minnesota or Illinois or Massachusetts or for the country. And part of being able to do well for your kids is to have a living wage job, to be able to make a decent living.

As I travel around the country, whether it be in metropolitan Minnesota or whether it be in the farm and rural areas, or whether it be Delta, MS, or East L.A. or Watts or inner-city Chicago or inner-city Baltimore, or where my wife's family are from, Letcher and Harlan Counties, Appalachia, KY, I think more than anything else, what people say to me—and my most recent focus group is the Minnesota State Fair, where about half the population comes in about 2 weeks—right now we have the State Fair there. People are focused on how to earn a decent living

and how to give their children the care they know they need and deserve.

That is what it is all about.

Mr. President, I think the policy goal for us ought to be as follows: When people work almost 52 weeks a year, 40 hours a week, they should not be poor in America. I bet any poll will show that 80 percent of the people agree with that. When people work almost 52 weeks a year, 40 hours a week, they shouldn't be poor in our country. It is that simple.

There are a number of things we can do that will make a real difference for families. We can have affordable health care. We should do that. We haven't done it yet. We should have affordable child care. We should figure out ways of providing assistance to parents, whether their child is in a family child care setting or child care center or staying at home.

The final thing we ought to do is raise the minimum wage; \$5.15 to \$6.15 is not unreasonable. My colleague from Massachusetts pointed out the work of the Economic Policy Institute. Everybody said the sky would fall. We have been going through this, I say to Senator KENNEDY, for half a century: If you raise the minimum wage, people will lose jobs. It did not happen; it will not happen. People, in fact, will have more money to buy and consume, which helps our economy.

Mr. President, I simply say to my colleagues that this is terribly important to women, because many of our minimum-wage workers are women. It is terribly important to adults, because the vast majority of minimum-wage workers are adults. It is also important to younger people whom maybe we do not view as adults—18, 19, 20, 21. Many of them are working to go to college.

This is a matter of economic justice. It is a matter of elementary decency.

I close with a more hard-hitting point. This is one I am not that comfortable with, but I think it really is true and needs to be said. My colleague said it once, and I will say it again. We don't have any hesitation in voting to raise our salaries. We make \$130,000 a year. We ought to be willing to vote a decent minimum wage for people. We really ought to be able to do that.

Colleagues have talked to me about how "I need to make \$130,000; I have two children, they are in college; I have an apartment here, live back home, it is very hard." My gosh, that is a pretty significant salary we make. I am not bashing public service. I believe in public service. But I think we also can vote for a higher minimum wage for working families in this country. We should do this, and we will bring this amendment to the floor.

We are going to have a major debate, and all of us will be accountable as to how we vote. I hope we have an overwhelming vote for increasing the minimum wage. I yield the floor.

Mr. DURBIN addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Under the agreement this morning, how much time is left?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader has time reserved until 10:30.

Mr. DURBIN. I thank you, Mr. President.

In this brief period of time, I first applaud my colleagues. I am glad that I have had the honor to serve in the U.S. Senate. I am particularly happy to represent a great State like Illinois. I am honored to be a Member of the Senate with my colleagues and, in particular, Senator KENNEDY who, time and time again throughout his career, has taken this floor to speak for those who do not have a lobby in Washington, to speak for those who do not have a special interest group with a large political action committee. When Senator KENNEDY comes to the floor to speak for the poor, for the dispossessed, for those who do not have health insurance and lack the opportunity many of us take for granted, I am honored in joining him. Now that I am in the Senate, I find I am joining him more and more. I want to do that this morning on this particular issue.

A few years ago at one of the National Democratic Conventions—I believe it was San Francisco—a resident of the city of Chicago, Jesse Jackson, the Reverend Jesse Jackson—not to be confused with his son, the Congressman—took to the floor of the convention hall and gave a speech I still remember today.

He spoke to that assembled multitude of people about why we are involved in politics and what Government should be about. Jesse Jackson said in his own way—and I can't even hope to get close to imitating his style or his conviction—he wanted to speak to us about the people who get up every morning and go to work every day. He talked about the people who clean the hotel rooms of the conventioners. He said they get up every morning and they go to work every day. The people who remove the dishes and glasses and cups from your table in the restaurant, they go to work every day. The people who watch our children in day-care centers, they go to work every day. The people who guard our homes, our offices, our schools, they go to work every single day.

For many of us, they are invisible. They are the work force of America. We tend to focus on the leadership, those who rise to the top in terms of the public spotlight, but for millions of Americans who are part of our work-force, they are such an essential part of American life, and, unfortunately, too many of us take them for granted.

What Senator KENNEDY is challenging us to do today as the U.S. Senate is not to ignore these workers and their families but, rather, to show them that we respect them, we respect the contribution they make to America, we honor their work, and we do it with a vote to increase their minimum wage.

Many of the critics of increasing the minimum wage like to argue, "Well, if you raise the minimum wage, people are just going to lay off a lot of these

workers; employers can't afford to pay them." That argument has been going on since the days of Franklin Roosevelt when we established the minimum wage. In very few instances, if ever, has that been the case.

The most recent increase in the minimum wage had exactly the opposite impact. More and more people were employed. What Senator KENNEDY is suggesting, raising the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.15 an hour over a 2-year period of time, is hardly unreasonable. It is a reasonable way for us to address the needs of many families.

We like to get on the floor here—and I have joined in this debate—and talk about eliminating welfare, changing welfare as we know it, moving people from welfare to work. I say to my friends, this is part of moving people from welfare to work, giving to those new workers a decent pay, a decent wage. These are people who get up and go to work every single day.

It is also about family dignity. If we really believe in family values, it has to go beyond a speech on the Senate floor. It has to go to a question of whether or not we will vote to make sure that families receive the money they need to make a living.

A lot of people argue, "Wait a minute, the minimum wage is just for kids, just for new employees—pay them a little amount of money because they don't have the experience." Seventy-four percent of the people on minimum wage are adults; 57 percent of the gains of the increase in this minimum wage will go to working families in the bottom 40 percent of the income scale.

The other people argue, "Wait a minute, don't worry about the minimum wage, that is for part-time workers." That is not the case. Fifty percent of the workers on minimum wage are full-time workers; 40 percent of them are the sole breadwinners for their families.

What will \$2,000 a year mean? That is what it will be if the increase goes through, \$2,000 a year for a family. To a low-income family struggling to survive, it means money for groceries and rent, to pay for drugs, and to pay perhaps for health insurance for their children. It is the difference in quality of life which we cannot overlook.

When the record is written about this Congress, questions will be asked: What did we achieve? Well, we haven't passed a budget resolution. We are now more than 4 months after the requirement to do it. We are struggling through the appropriations bills. I believe we will pass them. We have renamed the National Airport after President Ronald Reagan, and, folks, that's about it. Shouldn't we, before we leave, address the millions of Americans—200,000 in my home State of Illinois—who are, frankly, in a position where this increase in minimum wage could mean a dramatic increase in their quality of life?

I will be coming to the floor on this bankruptcy bill debate. My friend, Senator GRASSLEY from Iowa, and I have worked long and hard on this bill. We have our differences on it. But I will tell you this: I fully support what Senator KENNEDY and Senator WELLSTONE have set out to do, to make sure it is part of this debate that we will increase the minimum wage.

I hope those who are about to consider this issue, Republicans and Democrats alike, will understand that we are talking about people in America who get up and go to work every single day. They deserve our respect. They deserve an increase in their minimum wage.

I yield back the remainder of my time.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Under the previous order, the time between 10:30 and 11:30 a.m. shall be under the control of the Senator from Wyoming, Senator THOMAS, or his designee.

Senator THOMAS is recognized.

Mr. THOMAS. Thank you very much, Mr. President. I will alleviate your concern that I will take the whole hour. Nevertheless, I think I will be joined by some of my colleagues.

#### CONCERNS OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, it is an interesting time, of course, for us here. Entering into the last month of this Congress, we are faced, of course, with finishing the work that we have begun, and more particularly, in closing up the appropriations process so that the Government can continue to function with a real determination and, Mr. President, to assure that that happens and that we do not get into this business of accusing one another of closing down the Government because we do not agree on issues. I am very much persuaded we will have a continuing resolution so if we do have disagreements that cannot be resolved in this time that the Government will continue to go on. If it does not, it would be my opinion it would be up to the administration to have it shut down.

As was the case with most of the Senators here, I recently spent a month in my home State of Wyoming, having an opportunity to visit with people about things that concern them, having an opportunity, perhaps more importantly than visiting, to listen to what people believe to be the role of the Federal Government, what the people believe to be the issues most compelling to them. Of course, everyone has them.

In my State, where we have relatively little diversity in our economy, we have three basic economic areas: One is tourism, one is mineral extraction, and one is agriculture. Unfortunately, both agriculture and mineral extraction are not in good shape economically at the moment, and we are seeking to do something about that.

So this time I think is useful time for us. People always say, "Hey, you're on vacation." Well, it is not vacation. It is a very busy time. But it is a useful time and a chance to perhaps stand back a little and look at some of the broader problems. And that is so important, especially, I think, in this last month when we become so focused on every detail, every little appropriations process, where we tend sometimes to sort of get away from really the fundamental issues that we are here to represent.

So my comments today will simply represent my point of view. I do not allege to speak for anyone else. But I happen to think that one of the things that is most important to us as we deal with all issues is to have some philosophical guidance, some basic belief that you measure all these details against. Failing in that, it seems to me, it is very difficult to make decisions that are consistent, to make decisions that finally end up doing what you really believe in and what your philosophy ought to be.

One of the conclusions that I have reached, not only on my own certainly, but because of what I hear in Wyoming, people having heard it of course in the media, is that this administration is basically in limbo, that it will be for some time, that we have relatively little, if any, leadership coming from the administration. We need to recognize that and to move forward with the issues that confront us. We can do that. And we need to do that.

Frankly, we have had relatively little leadership over the last several years. This administration, in my judgment, and the judgment of others, has been one without any real basic commitment to a point of view or to a philosophy or to a direction, but rather driven more by polls and what happens to be the political thing at the moment. I suppose this is perhaps not a brand new idea, but one that I think is very dangerous and one that really does not direct us in the way that we ought to be going; that, indeed, instead we have a time of spin, an administration that is basically sort of predicated on how you can make things seem, whether they are that way or not, or whether, indeed, they are predicated on Saturday morning radio talks in which there are issues brought forth, and subsequently no real commitment to doing something about it, like the State of the Union in which things like "Social Security first" are mentioned, but then nothing is done as a followup.

That is a concern to me, that there is no real commitment and, frankly, relatively little real belief or commit-

ment or, indeed, character in terms of where we are going.

I think there are some major areas that need attention and that will be continuing to need attention. We need to look into them. One is foreign affairs, foreign policy—or a lack of foreign policy. Almost daily we see that some country—mostly the rogue countries—is challenging the rest of the world, challenging the United States. Why? Because they have begun to do this, and there is no real response, there is no reason why they shouldn't. Why shouldn't Iraq thumb their nose at us in terms of doing the weapons thing that they promised to do when obviously they are not going to be required to do that? We have not finished our job in Bosnia, Kosovo. Those things are still there.

We have the Asian currency issue, a difficult issue that impacts us, one that, again, we need to make some decisions as to where we are and let people know exactly where we are. The idea from the administration that we are going to raise that question is not a good enough answer—the most current one, of course, being North Korea, and which we have dealt with for some time, particularly through the KEDO arrangement, trying to find a way to cause them to control what they are doing in nuclear arms development in return for a substantial contribution on the part of the United States and Japan and South Korea to build light-water reactors to replace that. And yet, they seem basically to say, "Well, we appreciate what you are doing, but we are going to go ahead and do what we want to do. We are going to go ahead and fire missiles. We are going to go ahead and have underground development of nuclear weapons, nuclear materials."

We cannot do that, in my judgment. And I feel very strongly about it. I happen to be chairman of that subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific Rim. We are going to have another hearing this week. We had one just a month ago before we left and talked about the adherence to the KEDO agreement. There was certainly a notion that at that time things were being done that were not consistent with the plan.

I think we need to give some real consideration to our military preparedness. This is not a peaceful world. One of the best ways to ensure as much as we can that it is peaceful is to continue to have a strong defense force, a strong military, to be the world's strongest military. And we are. However, there is increasing evidence that we are not putting enough emphasis into it in terms of support for it, in terms of the distribution of our troops all over the world. It is very costly. It is very difficult, then, to meet the mission that we have given ourselves, and that is to be able to work in two theaters, if necessary, at one time. Some doubt that we can do that now. So we, I think, have to deal with those kinds of very difficult issues.